

CC DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

Now more than ever the SACP has a leadership duty in the NDR

This Discussion Document flows from discussions at the August SACP Central Committee meeting. Comrades are encouraged to submit responses as part of ongoing debate ahead of the SACP 14th National Congress in July 2017, where positions on issues raised in the document will be finalised

The 3 August 2016 local government elections emphasised a worrying trajectory of decline in popular support for the ANC. While at 54% the ANC still remains the electoral choice of the majority of South Africans, the gradual decline in support over several past elections and now the precipitous decline across most provinces and in urban as well as rural areas is a sobering indication of a trend. If not addressed, this loss of momentum will accelerate.

It is not, of course, just the electoral results of 3 August that are of concern. They are symptomatic of broader challenges. They are also less the consequence of opposition parties progressing and rather more the consequence of serious problems within the ANC. These include:

- Systemic money-driven factionalism from top to bottom. The 20 intra-ANC assassinations in the run-up to the elections and the subsequent assassination of another ANC councillor-elect in Tsolo and killings in eThekweni are an indication of just how dangerously sick large parts of our movement have become;

- The decision to run the ANC election campaign around the person of President Zuma also clearly cost the ANC many votes. Opinion polls suggest that President Zuma has a national approval rating in the lower 20% – far lower than that of the ANC itself. Where else in the world would a political party contesting in competitive elections choose to build its campaign around a deeply flawed personality cult?
- Related to all of the above is the endemic corruption in and corporate capture of much of the ANC's institutional machinery. This results in brazen manipulation of internal elections, membership lists, deployments, etc;
- Not since 2007 have we seen such visible signs of division amongst the national leadership and the wilful bypassing of ANC and cabinet-mandated positions on matters such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation, South African Airways, digital migration, nuclear energy, or the “Zwane task-team” on the banks, etc. There is a climate of extreme recklessness in parts of the ANC and in parts of government and across many parastatals.

While successive ANC conferences (and Alliance Summits) have recognised many of these features in general (corruption, sins of incumbency, factionalism, growing social distance from our mass base, etc.), in practice the ANC national, provincial and regional leaderships have shown little collective willingness or capacity to deal decisively with the issues.

One notable positive feature, however, of this year's local government elections relates to the SACP. While we should not exaggerate, it is surely not inaccurate to assert that alone among the Alliance partners, the SACP has emerged more unified, larger in membership, and relatively active on the ground. Clearly, we have resource constraints and our own organisational capacity is uneven in different localities,

but SACP activists played a critical role in many difficult situations, not least in areas which had become no-go zones for the ANC.

At our July 2015 Special National Congress we had already made the following observation: “The messages of support that we received from our Alliance partners, the ANC, Cosatu, and Sanco at this Congress have all affirmed the great hopes they are placing on the SACP as a Party of theory, a Party of activism, a tried and tested Party of revolutionary discipline...Last week’s Alliance Summit acknowledged that ... the SACP is the most stable and ideologically coherent formation within the Alliance. This is a time when the ANC is acknowledging many challenges related to incumbency and the influence of money on internal democracy. This is a moment in which the unrelenting capitalist offensive against Cosatu coincides with serious challenges to its unity and strength...more than ever before, we [the SACP] have a major responsibility...” (Declaration of SACP Special National Congress 11 July 2015)

That was just over a year ago. The downward trajectory within the ANC has continued apace since then, and the apparent lack of capacity and will to deal with the systemic challenges are more apparent than ever.

This is the context in which the SACP and State Power Commission must now take forward its work. When this Commission was first established, following a resolution of our 2005 Special National Congress, the situation was similar in some respects, but also quite different in others.

In 2005 the SACP (and a more unified Cosatu at the time) were involved in a struggle against neo-liberal hegemony within government and the ANC, led by an internal bloc that we called “the 1996 class Isoproject”. However, in 2005 the SACP was **also** dealing with an internal reformist wing (perhaps about one-third of our CC at the time)

which was closely aligned and actively collaborating with this 1996 class project. In this context, at our 2005 Special National Congress, some districts, notably Nelson Mandela Bay – legitimately frustrated at the side-lining of Party comrades by the 1996 class project-controlled ANC – called for the SACP to stand alone in forthcoming elections on a socialist/Marxist-Leninist platform. (Interestingly, the leading spokesperson for this at the 2005 SACP Special National Congress was Irvin Jim).

The SACP July 2007 National Congress dealt effectively with our former internal reformist wing, and the ANC's December 2007 Polokwane National Conference dealt a blow to the 1996 class project.

Post-2007, then, the internal demand for the SACP to stand alone electorally diminished for a time. However, the victorious Polokwane bloc of forces that was ranged against the 1996 class project led by Thabo Mbeki was itself a problematic marriage of convenience. It was composed of a left-wing grouping constituted essentially by the SACP and Cosatu, on the one hand, and a rabid tenderpreneur network led by the ANC Youth League, including personalities like Julius Malema at the time. While the SACP/Cosatu axis opposed the hegemonic neo-liberal grouping from a principled left perspective, the “anti neo-liberalism” of the ANCYL grouping was essentially an opposition to any limits placed by Treasury on the rapacious looting of public resources. With the inevitable fall-out and growing tensions between different components of the Polokwane “marriage of convenience”, internal calls for the SACP to stand independently in elections have once again surfaced, particularly from the YCL and some provinces.

It is important that we understand the similarities and differences between the 2005 and 2016 situations:

- The SACP is no longer confronted with a major 1996 class-project aligned, reformist faction within our own leadership ranks;

While there are legitimate tactical debates and differences within the Party (for example on the modality in which the Party is involved in elections) these differences are not grounded in major strategic divisions, or ideological factions;

- While the beginnings of “Gupterisation” (the flourishing of parasitic behaviour) within the ANC certainly date back to at least the Mbeki era, the degree to which this has now taken hold is seriously more advanced and dangerous. In 2005 the SACP’s principal focus in the internal ideological battles within both the Party and between the Party and the ANC/government was against the hegemony of neo-liberalism. The Party advanced a series of national democratic programmatic (and institutional) proposals – a democratic developmental state leading re-industrialisation (including beneficiation and localisation); a major state-led infrastructure programme; expansion of vocational training; urban spatial transformation; the transformation of the financial sector, etc. The Party also proposed a State Planning Commission. At its 2007 Polokwane conference the ANC endorsed all of these perspectives, and after the 2009 elections important but uneven progress was made in most of these areas. The unevenness (and deliberate undermining) of progress since 2009 (and particularly since 2014) in these and other areas has less to do with lingering neo-liberal perspectives, which of course still remain, and much more to do with the mushrooming of rabid corporate capture and parasitic looting.

The above are some observations concerning the current reality within which the question of the SACP and State and Popular Power needs to be contextualised.

What follows are some general points of principle regarding state power and elections:

State Power and Elections – five theses

Thesis 1 – State power is critical, but it is not an end in itself.

Thesis 2 – Electoral victories are important, but they are also not ends in themselves.

Thesis 3 – While electoral success is one means to achieving some influence and leverage over state power, electoral success (whether as a majority governing party standing on its own, or as part of a coalition, or alliance), does not guarantee effective exercise of state power. Many other factors are at play, these include:

- The institutional culture, capacity and strategic coherence across the range of state and parastatal institutions – including the public sector management cadre and rank-and-file public sector workers. Left-wing electoral mandates can be undermined by a recalcitrant judiciary, by right wing generals, by a bantustan legacy in the civil service, or by a lack of strategic discipline across the state (see for instance the current tendencies for state owned corporation (SOC) chairs and CEOs to supplant electoral mandates and/or Cabinet policy decisions in Eskom in regard to independent power producers, or with Icasa defying broadband access policy.) None of this is to suggest that the state administrative cadre, or the judiciary, or armed forces are inherently conservative, or that transformation of these sectors is not one of the critical tasks of any progressive party (whether it is “ruling” or not);
- Powerful external forces, whether regime change instigators or financial institutions like the IMF, the European Central Bank and ratings agencies can undermine an overwhelming electoral mandate (for instance against austerity – see the recent example of Greece);
- Popular electoral mandates can also be seriously undermined by governing party/coalition factionalism, ill-discipline and personality cults which, in turn are often linked to:

- Corporate capture of both party political structures/personalities and of state and parastatal organs.

Thesis 4 – The question of state power must not be isolated from the question of popular power both inside and outside of the state. It is not only capitalist forces outside of the state that have actual or potential leverage and influence over state power. Organised and mobilised popular power outside of the state but also inside of it (for instance, by way of progressive public sector unions) can be decisive in supporting or undermining a progressive governing party's capacity to govern. At the same time, we need to recognise that popular power is not necessarily progressive – fundamentalist, xenophobic, and fascist forces have also been capable of undermining or hijacking democratic dispensations by mobilising broad popular strata.

Thesis 5 – The correct approach for a progressive party to adopt in regard to electoral politics is not a timeless and de-contextualised matter that can be deduced abstractly and remain valid for all time. The specific conditions at any particular time, the particular electoral system, national political traditions and legacies and likely trajectories, and the electoral prospects of a party should all be clearly considered.

In regard to the last issue, for instance, a political party may have little prospect or even ambition of attaining state power in any immediate way through the ballot box, but this does not necessarily mean it should abstain from electoral participation. Before its unbanning in 1950 – the CPSA (Communist Party of South Africa) – actively contested (and won a few ward elections) in the midst of white-minority rule. The objective was to use the electoral space to mobilise and, as best as possible, popularise CPSA political perspectives. As the recent Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) electoral positioning has demonstrated, it is possible for an 8% party to have an impact on governance. A similar “deal-maker” medium-term strategic electoral role might be

considered by the SACP.

In this regard, tactical and strategic considerations need, also, to be contextualised within particular electoral systems and political party histories. What works in Brazil or France, for instance, might not work in South Africa and, conversely, it is important to understand our own potential advantages and challenges. In Brazil there is a direct election of the president by way of a two-round system. If no candidate wins over 50% of the vote in the first round, the two top scorers in the first round face-off in the second. This has enabled the PT (Workers' Party), currently with around only 17% of national congress representation, to win presidential elections (twice with Lula da Silva and latterly with Dilma Rousseff) by getting a range of centrist, centre-left, and left parties (including the communist party, the PCdoB) to support their presidential candidate in the second round. France also has a two-round electoral system. In a first round in municipal elections, for instance, Communist, Socialist and various leftist formations might contest against each other. In a second round, where there have been pre-arranged agreements, the left parties will unite in supporting the candidate that performed best from within their ranks. In the recent past, this has enabled the French Communist Party (PCF) to control numbers of municipalities, while supporting socialist mayors in others.

In South Africa, without a two-round dispensation, there is certainly still the possibility of SACP candidates contesting ANC candidates in ward elections, for instance, with a view to forming a post-election ANC/SACP council coalition. However, given the level of tensions and hostility (even assassinations) within the ANC itself in ward candidate list processes, we should certainly not assume that it will be easy to achieve some pre-electoral "gentleman's" agreement between the ANC and SACP. This, of course, does not mean that this strategic approach

should necessarily be ruled out.

At the same time, we also need to factor in the internationally unique reality that we enjoy in South Africa as the SACP – the possibility and actuality of dual membership, that is the possibility and actuality of South African Communists participating as full members in all ANC structures. As we know from concrete experience this also gives rise to many challenges – the danger of being co-opted, of losing our own identity, of being treated as “second class” ANC members if not constitutionally, then in practice. But it also gives a unique opportunity to help to shape and take joint responsibility for the ANC. Would dual membership survive a situation in which the SACP contested elections independently? It is possible that the ANC would not allow this or the situation might deteriorate so seriously within the ANC that the loss of dual membership rights might be a necessary step – even a necessary step for the SACP to play an active role in rescuing the ANC in the medium term. Once more, we are flagging these questions not to rule out different options, but to provide the basis for seriously weighing up the pros and cons around any tactical and strategic choices.

Thesis 6 – multi-party elections in societies dominated by monopoly capital present serious electoral campaign challenges for principled progressive parties (and especially for a Communist/Marxist-Leninist party). This is, in part, related to the huge campaign expenses involved in so-called “competitive” multi-party elections in “liberal” capitalist societies.

The US political system is probably the most corporately-captured in the world. Huge sums of campaign money are required for contesting even relatively minor local public office. Indeed, as several academic commentators have noted, the relationship between winning elections and election funding has often become inverted – with the very point of winning elections being to raise more funding in order to win the

next elections. Needless to say, this electoral treadmill becomes a major avenue for corporate capture of individuals and of party political machinery.

By June 2016, with the actual presidential elections six months away, Democrat and Republican presidential hopefuls had already spent a combined R10-billion (\$700-million) in their respective party primaries according to the US Federal Election Commission. This figure excluded the hundreds of millions more raised and spent by outside groups supporting different candidates. Clearly, this funding comes largely from the big US corporates (who often hedge their bets by simultaneously funding more than one candidate and both major parties). Bernie Sanders, who ran Hilary Clinton a surprisingly close race from a left-leaning position for the Democratic nomination, managed to challenge to some degree the corporate media and funding boycott of his campaign by using social media and crowd-funding innovations. But, in the end, the corporate-dominated Democratic Party machine marginalised his efforts.

Although election campaign spending in South Africa is not as remotely expensive as in the US, electioneering has become an increasingly burdensome reality. The official spend figure from the ANC's head-office for the 3 August local government elections is a whopping R380-million, this is the figure formally accounted for by the ANC Treasurer General. It is a figure that excludes the funding received by many individual ANC personalities and factions with strong ties to the corporate world, some of which would have been spent on the ANC campaign and some of it will have disappeared into private and factional pockets. Mpumalanga premier David Mabuza was provided with the use of an ANC-branded helicopter for 10 days on the eve of the elections and this, presumably, was not included in the ANC's R380-million election budget. Mabuza was also reported to have received a

donation of R7,5-million and 13 new vehicles from the businessman Robert Gumede (*City Press*, 31 July 2016).

The DA's official electoral funding was not much less than that of the ANC. According to a *Sunday Times* report: "DA officials said its election budget of R350-million was likely to be exceeded thanks to private funders." (31 July, 2016). Some of the DA's funding, we do not know exactly how much, comes from foreign sources.

What about the EFF? On the evidence of a relatively prominent, nation-wide poster campaign and bearing in mind the logistical costs involved in several large rallies, the EFF clearly also had significant funding. A figure of "not more than R10-million" mentioned publicly by an EFF spokesperson is almost certainly an under-statement. However, it is clear that EFF funding was significantly less than that of the ANC and DA, which explains the R30-million election campaign debt one EFF leader has mentioned, as well as the EFF's attempt to tax newly elected EFF councillors 50% of their salaries for the first three months. (In a later section we will explain our analysis of the strategy behind foreign and domestic capital's drip-feed funding of the EFF.) Apart from the proportional party political allocation made by the national and provincial legislatures, the actual sources of EFF funding are not publicly available. There are, however, occasional glimpses of where some of its funding might be coming from. In a 2015 *City Press* article, Adriano Mazzotti, an Italian with underworld connections and an associate of the convicted criminal Glen Agliotti, admitted that it was he who donated R200 000 to enable the EFF to register as a political party ahead of the 2014 national elections. In the same article Mazzotti declined to answer whether he was also assisting Julius Malema settle his R18-million liability with SARS (*City Press*, 29 April 2015). Malema's association with Mazzotti clearly dates back to the period when he was still ANC YL president.

There is a further highly problematic feature of these hundreds of millions of rands spent by South African political parties in the local government election campaigns. It is money diverted from productive and developmental investment into consumables with built-in redundancy – posters, media advertising in the major monopoly-controlled outlets, T-shirts (mostly imported), and razzmatazz mass rallies. In short, this is politics as spectacle in which the monopoly-controlled media-advertising complex reaps millions with little or any developmental impact.¹

In short, the increasing Americanisation of South African electoral politics:

- Further opens up our political system to massive corporate capture;
- Weakens national sovereignty by way of foreign funding of South African political parties;
- Creates a significant electoral entry barrier to any principled, anti-monopoly political party or electoral platform;
- Feeds into the factionalising of the ANC and the undermining of its formal electoral mandate;
- Diverts ANC and Alliance energies, resources and focus from campaigning and organisation directed at the actual challenges facing popular strata (unemployment, crime, household indebtedness) into a narrow electoralism; and
- Disproportionally favours a pro-monopoly, anti-working class political party like the DA.

For all these reasons the SACP firmly supports:

- Tighter regulation to ensure full transparency in party political funding. The SACP certainly has every interest in ensuring transparency in party political funding, regardless of whether the SACP decides to participate independently in elections or not. But the ANC

also needs to realise that it is in its own interests to ensure transparency is introduced, since donations to the ANC are often captured by individuals or factions, and since lack of transparency is a major pathway into corporate capture. In particular, foreign funding of South African political parties for election purposes needs to be outlawed;

- The signing into law of the Financial Intelligence Centre Amendment Bill. This Bill was passed by parliament early in 2016 but has still not been signed into law by the President. Among other things, the Bill seeks to strengthen financial scrutiny of politically influential persons. This and other measures to deal with money laundering, corruption and financing of terrorism is an important means for addressing corporate capture and for safeguarding our electoral system.

The role of the SACP in elections since 1994

Since 1994, the SACP has been active in every election through contributing to the ANC election manifesto (beginning with the 1994 RDP, in which the SACP played a leading role), in electoral campaigning both under the ANC banner and also independently in our own right, and in the ANC electoral list processes (of course with varying degrees of success). This post-1994 electoral stance by the SACP has been possible because of the internationally unique reality of dual membership as we have already noted in an earlier section. SACP members are also ANC members and many serve in leadership positions throughout the ANC. It is important to remember that the dual membership formulation is not the result of some backroom deal, but a reality forged over many decades in which Communists have played a leading role in building and defending the ANC.

The SACP's post-1994 electoral stance was also informed by our

continued programmatic commitment to pursuing a radical national democratic revolution. Which brings us back to our strategic Theses 1 and 2 flagged above – state power is not end in itself, nor is winning elections. We cannot have a narrow focus on state power and elections without locating the question of state and popular power within the more strategic question: power for what objectives? In the South African context this immediately raises the centrality of a radical NDR.

The continued validity of a 2nd radical phase of the NDR

Cosatu comrades prepared notes for a recent SACP/Cosatu bilateral which included the following observation: “Accepting that the SACP has chosen the NDR as the South African Road to Socialism...the question must be raised as to how Cosatu can work to popularise the SACP’s road to Socialism and position the SACP as the socialist government in waiting...” (Cosatu, Notes for a Bilateral Meeting with the SACP, June 2016).

While this observation was well-intentioned it betrays a problematic assumption. Certainly, the SACP’s core strategic purpose is to be a vanguard anti-capitalist force for socialism within the wider context of popular democratic struggles. But surely the SACP must not understand itself as “in-waiting”. The dangers of this “in-waiting” characterisation are several:

- It implies that the SACP hasn’t (or shouldn’t) assume any governance responsibilities in this “stage”. Conversely, it would suggest that where we have a presence in governance, we are opportunistic hitch-hikers taking a free ride on the NDR but with an entirely different agenda. (This is something that the liberal media constantly taunt us with: “Who gave you a mandate to be in government?” – as if SACP members have not been members of the ANC since the 1920s);

- The idea of the SACP as a “socialist government in waiting” can easily (but surely unintentionally) take us back to what the 1996 class project sought to do, namely marginalise the SACP in “this stage”, saying, in effect: “Yes, we agree, socialism is the future...but build it **then**” (with “then” understood to be some impossibly distant utopian future);
- The “in-waiting” can encourage, on the side of the party, a narrow elite “socialist” vanguardism, typical of left-sectarian cliques. This kind of vanguardism stands critically aloof from the realities of the day, confident that its day will come. As we said, as the core theme of last year’s Special National Congress, the SACP must take responsibility for the NDR. In the wake of more recent events this is surely more relevant than ever before.

Against mechanical stageism – the NDR is not a “first stage” with socialism a “second stage”

Since at least our 8th National Congress in 1995 where the slogan “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!” was first officially adopted, the SACP has sought to break with the notion of “two-stageism”, asserting of the NDR:

- It is not a “first stage”, with socialism a “second stage”;
- It is not a “detour” but, in the current global and national reality, an NDR and socialism are deeply inter-twined;
- Indeed, the NDR is not even best understood as the “most direct route” to socialism. This still implies that the NDR is a “road” (ie: a strategy) while socialism is the “destination” (ie: the goal). This still has the shadow of stageism hanging over it, as well as the danger of imagining there is some inevitability about the relationship between the NDR and socialism (“our day will come – the inevitable advance of the forces of production are making it so”);

- It might imply that socialism is an “end state” – rather than itself a complex transitional period characterised by many contradictions, advances but also likely retreats, that will require: an ongoing national democratic defence of the socialist project – without which socialism can be reversed (note how Cuba and China both defend their socialist advances and aspirations with their own versions of democratic patriotism).

The ANC does not own the NDR

In advancing the thesis that now more than ever the SACP must assume leadership responsibilities not just for socialism but also for the NDR, we are not arguing for a “go it alone” SACP approach. We must be clear that advancing, defending and consolidating the NDR requires a broad popular movement against imperialism and monopoly capital. The SACP is not, and should not aspire to be, the sum total of such a broad popular movement.

On the other hand:

- While the ANC, historically, has sometimes been the most important organisational form for this broad movement – the NDR is not reducible to, or simply identical with the ANC;
 - There were periods in the 1920s, for instance, when the ICU was, in practice, a more effective radical national democratic movement than a rather respectable and often dormant ANC. Often suppressed from official ANC histories is the existence, in the 1930s, of an Independent ANC working closely with the CPSA, which, again, proved much more capable at that time than the formal ANC itself in organising the working class and rural poor. There are many other historical questions of this kind. For instance, was the UDF a more effective NDR mass formation than anything we have since post-1994?
- We need to understand that the ANC does not have some God-given

right to eternally lead the NDR. We need to recognise that at different times during its nonetheless generally proud and heroic existence, the ANC has been largely missing in action. In acknowledging these realities, we better prepare ourselves for posing the difficult and painful questions of our time:

- Can the ANC still lead the NDR? Is the ANC in a terminal downward spiral? Can the ANC be revitalised? Or will the ANC suffer a major break-up?
- Do we need a re-configured Alliance? And if so, what actually do we mean by that?
- Or do we need to help build a new popular movement/ND movement/Popular coalition?

These are painful questions because, dating back to the late 1920s, hundreds of thousands of South African Communists have gone to jail, have suffered martyrdom, have served in the ranks of MK, have worked tirelessly to build a powerful ANC capable of leading a revolutionary alliance. But, today, there are no clear-cut answers to any of the questions posed above. However, it is possible to distinguish some trends.

The negative problems within the ANC are more and more indicative of systemic features that affect the organisation at all levels. This is not to say that there are not many good ANC comrades, and many pockets of relative health and of internal and surely growing resistance to the decay. However, for the moment, the most reckless and parasitic forces have managed to colonise large parts of the organisation. The ability (or even the willingness) of the ANC collectively to embark on serious self-correction is (at least for the moment) uncertain.

Will the ANC's December 2017 National Conference (or an earlier conference as is being mooted) provide impetus for change? This is possible and desirable, but far from certain.

All of this means that in the current fluid situation the SACP should

not place all of its tactical and medium-term strategic calculations in one basket including (but not only) any decision about future modalities of SACP involvement in elections.

- We must, as best as possible, seek to help the revitalisation of the ANC on the basis of a principled and unifying programme. In supporting such revitalisation the SACP must scrupulously avoid simply becoming part of another ANC faction or personality based fan-base. In this respect there are self-critical lessons that as a Party we must learn from the 2007-2009 period;
- We must more clearly define (for ourselves in the first place) what we mean by a reconfigured Alliance, and proceed to reconfigure actively in practice – while engaging with our Alliance partners, of course, but without necessarily awaiting for full consensus that might never arrive;
- We must, as the SACP, and with or without the ANC, continue to reach out to a range of progressive formations, in particular around practical programmes and issues – as we are doing with the South African Council of Churches corporate capture project, for instance.
- Clearly, this means that, among other things, the SACP's Red October campaigns are a critical means for rooting ourselves amongst the broad working class and popular masses. But here we need to ask more self-critical questions. What substantively have we achieved with our campaigns? Are we able to effectively sustain them? From one October to the next October, do we sufficiently review and assess progress?
- If we understand our current challenge is to assume greater responsibility for the NDR in the current reality, then this must also have implications for the style and manner in which the SACP conducts itself. A narrow left sectarianism, preaching to other formations with a jargon-filled Marxist arrogance is exactly how we should not

conduct ourselves. While setting an example of commitment, activism and strategic clarity in practice, we should also learn from other struggles and collective organisational experiences – for instance, of women in stokvels and co-ops. Or from those who, driven by desperation, “illegally” occupy land. We should not close ourselves off from other progressive influences on the youth – we should read, understand critically, and celebrate Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko, for instance.

But if we are to play a more active leadership role in the NDR – how do we understand the NDR?

An inability to provide a clear strategic understanding of the NDR in the current phase, still less of a radical second phase of the NDR, is one of the symptoms of the ANC’s serious decline. Part of the SACP assuming responsibility for the NDR must also be providing a broad strategic perspective and actual content to the NDR in the current phase. What follows is simply a schematic outline, in which, for the purposes of exposition we outline separately the three (in reality deeply integrated) pillars of the NDR (the “N”, the “D” and the “R”).

The NDR’s national dimension

The national aspect of our NDR itself embraces several components:

- Radical/progressive nationalism – the NDR requires on-going mobilisation around the “national grievance” of the historically oppressed. Communists must not abandon the “national question” to opportunists of the left (EFF), or of the right (tenderpreneurs, Gupta supporters). Nor must we abandon a radical and progressive nationalism in the name of espousing an empty “multi-racial” rainbowism. Any principled non-racialism (as the SACP has understood since the late 1920s) must place overcoming the systemic features that reproduce racialised inequality and poverty at the centre of its strategic perspective;

- Nation building – nation building is not just the important cultural, symbolic, and ideological tasks (“Rhodes must fall”, de-colonisation, principled non-racialism, etc.), but also material conditions for nation building (a new development path, infrastructural transformation, overcoming apartheid space);
- These latter national tasks in our South African reality can only be, also, anti-monopoly capital – for instance, the manner in which private monopoly property holdings and property speculation block the transformation of apartheid urban geography;
- Democratic national sovereignty – the “national” dimension of the NDR is also critically about consolidating an effective national democratic state and popular power capable of defending our democratic national sovereignty as best as possible in a hostile world – ie: any serious NDR has to be anti-imperialist; but
- To be anti-imperialist means also struggling in solidarity with all victims of imperialism, therefore a consistent anti-imperialism must be internationalist.

When articulated in this way, it should be clear why an effective NDR in the South African reality requires a socialist vanguard party.

The NDR’s democratic dimension

Thoroughgoing democratisation of South Africa is both a key objective of and the principal means for advancing the NDR. It involves:

- Deepening, consolidating and defending democratic constitutional rights (eg. the right to work – see the Freedom Charter “everyone has the right and duty to work”);
- Deepening one-person one-vote representative democracy which involves new challenges:
 - Insulating democracy from corporate capture, money politics;
 - Dangers of factionalism, gate-keeping, candidate selection;

- Tendencies towards federalist dissipation of the NDR via provincial legislatures for instance.
- Participatory (direct) democracy – (re)-building organs of popular power. What is the experience with community policing forums, school governing bodies, ward committees, ward budgeting, community work programs, co-ops, worker control, etc? Have we been able to build popular power through these and other participatory institutions? If not, how do we organisationally advance democratic popular power?

The NDR's revolutionary dimension

The **revolutionary** dimension of the NDR refers not to an event but to the revolutionary struggle for deep structural transformation – placing our political economy onto a new sustainable, developmental path that goes to the root in radically transforming those structural features that continue to reproduce the crises of racialised (and class, gendered and spatial) inequality, poverty and unemployment. In very general terms this involves:

- A second more radical phase of the NDR;
- A democratic developmental state bound by strategic discipline;
- Unity of working class and popular strata – ie: popular democratic hegemony in all sites of power; and
- Preferably sustained majority rule – (have we sufficiently leveraged sustained majority electoral support over the past 22 years?) and not two-party alternation.

Which brings us directly to:

The strategic party political agenda of imperialism & monopoly capital in South Africa – a “centrist” stalemate

Before considering the South African reality more directly, it is important to note that globally “liberal democratic” multi-party dispensa-

tions are now in deepening trouble, including within the advanced capitalist countries themselves. Many mainstream commentators are now speaking about a “crisis of representation”. This is in marked contrast to the 1990s triumphalism that proudly proclaimed that “liberal democratic” dispensations along with “free market” policies were a global and irreversible trend.

Some background might be useful. With the weakening, and the eventual collapse of the Soviet bloc and the ending of the Cold War period, (neo-)liberal think-tanks trumpeted the dawn of a “third wave of democratisation”, in which increasingly large swathes of the world would embrace “liberal democratic multi-party” dispensations. This was the agenda that was advocated and implemented in varying degrees throughout the former Soviet bloc. But it was also an agenda that targeted former pro-imperialist, authoritarian regimes, including white minority rule in South Africa. With the ending of the Cold War, many pro-Western regional gendarme states had become a liability to the globalisation interests of imperialism and pressure was placed on them to negotiate elite-pacted “transitions to democracy” (from the Philippines to the military juntas in much of Latin America, to PW Botha’s apartheid regime). Of course, this imperialist-driven “democratisation” agenda was not (and still isn’t) applied consistently – notably in the Middle East, with Zionist Israel and petro-feudal Saudi Arabia being obvious examples.

After 1994, and for several years, South Africa was hailed in imperialist circles as a poster-child for the supposed global “Third Wave of Democratisation” underway. President Mbeki’s African Renaissance took up this theme, promoting “liberal democracies” in Africa. Of course, the democratic breakthrough in South Africa was an important step forward, and both here in South Africa and in many parts of Latin America, for instance (Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador), progressive

forces have been able to use democratisation to advance more nationally sovereign, social and economic agendas, countering the worst of right-wing imposed structural adjustment programmes, expanding social security systems and even advancing some national (re-)industrialisation.

But for imperialism and local monopoly capitalist interests this was not what was intended as an outcome of democratisation in the global South. In particular, where democratically elected, left-leaning (or just centre-left) patriotic forces have achieved a degree of relative electoral permanency (in Brazil until recently, or South Africa, for instance), and therefore a capacity to drive systemic changes in their respective societies, this is seen as a threat to imperialist interests.

While various regime change and “colour” revolutions are attempted, the preferred imperialist option is to introduce “electoral uncertainty” and therefore regular alternation between political elites – a political, centrist stalemate. And yet it is precisely this kind of institutionalised “democratic” system that is in deepening crisis, even in the heartlands of Western democracy.

Without going into detail here, some of the symptoms of this crisis include the Brexit referendum, the Trump phenomenon and its counter in an unpopular “least worst” corporate candidate, Hilary Clinton. There is the relative and unanticipated success of politicians and movements representing varying degrees of popular rejection of the “political establishment” in the heartlands of Western democracy. There are left-leaning politicians like the UK labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn (currently at war with his own parliamentary caucus), Bernie Sanders in the US, or formations like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. By and large, these political personalities and formations have drawn their strength by mobilising politically alienated younger generations, often relying on the new social media, YouTube, crowd funding and

other means to bypass hostile media, and the corporate and the political establishment.

In many parts of Europe the old centre-left/centre-right alternance has been seriously disrupted. This is sometimes done by an anti-politics politics, as is the case with the Five Star Movement in Italy, led by a comedian Beppe Grillo, which now controls major cities like Rome and Turin. But the crisis of “liberal democracy” is also manifested in the alarming rise of chauvinistic forces (Trump, of course, but also United Kingdom Independent Party in the UK which mobilised the Brexit vote, or the AfD in Germany²) and extreme right-wing, proto-fascist movements in Greece and France, which have seen their electoral support rise significantly. In some cases, extreme right forces are now the dominant political formations in their countries (Austria, Hungary).

It is important always to remember that neither the SACP nor the broader ANC-led Alliance single-handedly shape the electoral terrain. Other forces also do so. Since the late 1980s, the key liberal strategists aligned to both South African monopoly capital and imperialist think-tanks recognised the importance of having an “ANC brand” governing in South Africa, at least for a transitional period of a decade or two, without which stabilisation within the framework of a “liberal democracy” would be impossible. However, there were two problems for this strategic agenda:

- The presence and influence of the SACP and a radical trade union federation, Cosatu. within the ANC-led Alliance; and
- The fear that the ANC as an electoral party would achieve sustained and overwhelming majority electoral support. In a one-party dominant system, monopoly capital is often more limited in its ability to play off (and pay off) “competing” centre-left/centre-right parties. A political party or popular movement with sustained and overwhelming majority support has (in theory) greater autonomy

from capital.

This fear of one-party dominance is why all the liberal media in the past weeks have hailed the August 3 election as a “maturing” of South Africa’s democracy – as if previous 60% plus majorities for the ANC were a sign of electoral “immaturity”.

The current flirtation between the DA and EFF is not part of either’s long-game strategy. In particular, the DA’s medium-term strategy is to make common ground with a moderated ANC – either in a coalition or in a liberal centre-right/centre-left dominated electoral dispensation of the kind that has (but increasingly no longer) characterised “mature” liberal democracies. This is a preferred outcome for monopoly capital and imperialist circles – because it provides for the appearance of democratic choice and competition, but essentially introduces an institutionalised stalemate that would be especially inappropriate for our South African reality that so evidently requires a major structural revolution.

When Zille was still DA leader she frequently articulated a perspective in which the DA, once it had knocked the ANC down to below 50% support nationally, would be able, as part of a coalition deal, to force the “constitutionalists”, “the moderate centre” within the ANC to cut loose the “radicals” on the “left”. This is exactly the 2019 agenda that commentators like Alistair Sparks and Peter Bruce have recently evoked (see Bruce: “Coalition deals will soon test South Africa’s political maturity”, *Business Day*, 5 August 2016). In this article, Bruce urges Maimane to explore coalitions with the ANC in Johannesburg and Tshwane: “We all know Zuma is a problem. But, as we are constantly reminded by the voices raised against him within the ANC, his party is not a lost cause.”

The DA won’t do this now, not because they believe the EFF is closer to them, but because coalitions with the ANC at this point don’t suit

the DA's 2019 agenda. It hopes to bring the ANC down below 50% nationally by then, as a result of its own inroads but also as a result of on-going inner turmoil within the ANC. It is only then, from a position of greater strength, that it will explore cooperation with a weakened ANC.

We are not suggesting that there is some grand conspiracy – but there is a strategy! And this broad imperialist/monopoly capital/DA strategy also explains the love-hate positioning from these quarters in regard to the EFF. The acres of media coverage that the EFF has enjoyed over the past two years is, in part, a measure of the dumbing down of media commentary in South Africa, in which one-liners and melodrama drown out serious analysis. But it is also a result of the role required of the EFF – to knock the ANC's electoral majority but without the EFF itself advancing much beyond 8%. In this sense, the EFF has perfectly performed its assigned role within this strategy in these local government elections.

It is precisely the role that many commentators from the mid-1990s had hopefully assigned to the SACP – with their endless and hypocritical encouragement of the SACP to fight elections on our own.

It is noticeable that there has now been a relative cooling in the commercial media towards the EFF, but from a neo-liberal perspective they still have an 8% role in the run-up to 2019. Of course, we should not make the mistake of believing that all or even a majority of EFF leaders, let alone supporters, are knowing role-players in this agenda. The EFF leadership is also hoping to split and/or knock the ANC down to less than 50% nationally and provincially. In the post 3 August negotiations, EFF leaders indicated to the ANC negotiators that they would “never” form a coalition with the DA. Their only coalition partner, they said, would be the ANC – “but not now”.

The imperialist/monopoly capital/DA strategic agenda might play

out successfully. But it will be a disaster for South Africa. The NDR will be stuck and the state capacity to transform the underlying systemic features reproducing racialised inequality, poverty and unemployment will be set back even further.

One of the key weaknesses and a strategic blind spot of this DA/monopoly capital agenda is its inability to read and understand the impact and role of the SACP. They characterise the ANC as being in two blocs:

- A moderate **“liberal”** bloc – the “constitutionalists”;
- The **“radicals”** – the “Pirates of Polokwane”, to which the SACP and Cosatu are assigned, but along with the Gupatas, Zumas, etc.

Given this DA/monopoly capital strategic agenda, it becomes clearer why the SACP’s current positioning – defending the constitution (which is not a liberal but, in many respects, a national democratic constitution), campaigning against corruption and corporate capture, becomes so important, in holding the line of a radical NDR underpinned by popular power.

While continuing to play an active, vanguard role in the struggle that has now intensified and broadened in the post-3 August period against corruption and against the abuse of state organs like the National Prosecuting Authority, the SACP has a wider responsibility. Yes, we must steadfastly support Treasury in its determined effort to hold the line against corruption. We must expose those who, out of rank opportunism, are attacking the major banks for flagging dozens of suspicious financial transactions. We must unite against corruption with all of those from within our broad movement and beyond, notwithstanding past or present ideological differences.

We must also acknowledge that the problems of corporate capture and corruption have worsened and become more systemic over the past decade. We must be open to criticism and self-criticism about the SACP’s own shortcomings over this period.

But as a principled party of socialism, the SACP also has a wider responsibility. We must actively counter the narrative that all of South Africa's problems of low growth and crisis-levels of unemployment and poverty are simply the result of a post-Polokwane "loss of moral compass". Corporate capture of the state and of political movements is not just about venal, material corruption. It is also about ideological and moral capture. These latter forms of corporate hegemony were well advanced by the second half of the 1990s within key parts of both the post-apartheid state and the ANC.

The accelerated removal of capital controls, excessive trade liberalisation, misguided state complacency in allowing major South African corporates to list overseas, and much more, saw trillions of rands flowing "legally" and illegally out of our country. The neo-liberal myth that public sector investment "crowds out" private investment and the failure to invest in key social and economic infrastructure from the mid-1990s further crippled job creation and local public and privately owned industries. This corporate capture by established monopoly capital of leading parts of the state from the mid-1990s was sweetened for many in the new "ruling" caste with narrow "black economic power" deals that further diverted hundreds of billions of rands out of potentially productive, job creating investment.

Since the mid-1990s the SACP has consistently advanced these perspectives and concerns. They require repeating and developing today – not to score a sectarian point, or to factionalise the necessary and immediately pressing requirement of a broad front against the most venal forms of material corruption, corporate capture and the abuse of the prosecuting authorities or the public broadcaster. The point is to ensure that the rolling back of Gupta-isation does not simply take us back once more into the recent past. The ideological and programmatic corporate capture of key parts of the state from the mid-1990s created

the conditions in which the systemic flourishing of outright corruption has now taken hold.

The future cannot be the recent past. Let us defeat Gupterrisation to advance on the path of a radical national democratic revolution.

Revitalization and mobilisation of the key motive forces of the national democratic revolution

One of the most important observations of the SACP in its analyses of some of the setbacks from the 2016 local government elections, and some of the cumulative effects of the problems analysed in this document, is that the ANC, and to a certain extent the Alliance as a whole, has been loss of contact with, or leadership over, the principal motive forces of our revolution. Sustained focus on organisation building both within the ANC and across the Alliance is fundamental. Given the important role that the SACP has to increasingly play in the revitalisation of the motive forces of our revolution it is essential that it defines, its own role in this challenge much more clearly.

While the rebuilding and reconnection with the principal motive forces of our revolution must still be headed by the ANC, this task can however not be led by the ANC alone. As agreed in our recent Alliance Political Council, each of the Alliance partners will have to look closely at its organisational structures and mode of organisation, particularly asking the question on whether these are still relevant. An important question to be asked by the Alliance as a whole is whether the modus operandi of the Alliance since 1994 has not exhausted itself.

If the SACP is to fulfil the many tasks identified above, it will be important that we direct much of our energies and resources into building a much larger, but quality and activist, SACP going into the next 10 years. The SACP needs to escalate its mass campaigns, and use these as platforms to deepen its work among the various sectors of society.

In summary

1. The NDR is in serious crisis – the SACP has a major role in providing ideological, organisational and activist leadership at this time.
2. The question of the Party and State Power needs to be considered within this context and not in abstract terms.
3. State power and winning elections are not ends in themselves. The question of state power should not be reduced to winning elections alone.
4. The political situation is fluid. There are many uncertainties about the ANC's ability to address its own internal problems, and particularly what the outcome of 2017 will be. In this overall context it is important that the SACP keeps its tactical options open while continuing to build its structures, its ideological unity, and, above all, its activism on the ground. ●

NOTES

1. For useful studies focusing on the US in this respect, see Robert W McChesney and John Nichols, "The Bull Market. Political Advertising", *Monthly Review*, vol.63, April 2012; and Mary V Wrenn, "Surplus Absorption and Waste in Neoliberal Monopoly Capitalism", *Monthly Review*, vol.68, July-August 2016 – both available on the *Monthly Review* (<http://monthlyreview.org>).
2. AfD: Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany), a right wing German party opposing the European Community and migration into Germany (among its slogans is "Islam is not a part of Germany"). It won 7% of the national vote in 2014